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SPAIN:

HOLIDAY NOTES

AND IMPRESSIONS.

BY

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Reprinted from 'St. Bartholomew's Hospital Journal,' August, 1902.



LONDON.

PRINTED BY ADLARD AND SON,

LONDON AND DORKING.

1902.

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NOTES OF A HOLIDAY IN AND IMPRESSIONS OF SPAIN.

MOST people who travel at all have visited France, Belgium, and Switzerland, but Spain is a little off the usual track of European travel, and it attracts relatively a mere sprinkling of English visitors. This is due to many causes. It is less convenient of access than these countries. The train service is bad; one fast train only per day, and that usually run at night, is not enticing as a means of locomotion. These fast trains seem to stop at all the stations, and the ordinary trains stop between the stations as well. The hotels are not up to date; the culinary art, to put it mildly, is unsatisfactory in all but the larger towns, and many of the comforts which an Englishman is accustomed to are absent. Whatever drawbacks there may be, Spain is a fascinating country, and deserves a foremost place for holiday travel, being rich both in historical associations and romance, and also in treasures of art and architecture. I hope that these reminiscences of a recent holiday spent there will be interesting, especially to those who intend to be present at the International Congress of Medicine to be held in Madrid in April, 1903.

Cheerless and discouraging were the circumstances under which we started upon our journey southwards on February 1st, 1902. The Channel crossing was abominable. A gale which surpassed anything experienced for ten years

at least made it highly dangerous to attempt to enter the harbour of Calais. The steamer therefore went on to the sister port of Boulogne, which has the advantage of being sheltered by Cape Grisnez, and there we landed. Most of the passengers looked the very incarnation of sea-sickness. We reached Paris shortly before midnight, and a very good dinner quickly soothed our squeamish stomachs.

The next day we started from the Gare d'Orsay. This station is one of the finest, and certainly the cleanest and quietest for its size and importance, in Europe. There is no smoke. The train is drawn by an electric engine for some little distance out of Paris, and by a similar engine both passengers and luggage are lowered to the station.

Leaving at 12.15, we travelled across France through the valley of the Loire, a lovely country studded with old châteaux, reminding one of "the Dukeries" in our own country, and passing Tours, Poitiers, Bordeaux, and Biarritz to Irun, the frontier town, where the luggage was examined, and we and our luggage were transferred into a Spanish train. Here we first met with the Guardia Civil, a noteworthy feature of Spanish travel. The Civil Guard is a fine corps of nearly 20,000 men. It is the most trustworthy body in Spain for the defence of law and order, and is under the control of the War Minister. Two men belonging to this corps travel in every train. In case of any difficulty it is best to apply to them for help.

About half an hour after leaving the frontier we passed through San Sebastian, the summer resort of the Court, and then entered the gorges of the Pyrenees, with magnificent mountain scenery of the wildest kind. After traversing barren and treeless plains we reached Burgos. It was piercingly cold here; the streets were covered deep in snow. On arriving at the hotel we were glad to warm ourselves over the glowing embers of a brazero, for there were no fireplaces in our rooms.

Burgos is the home of the Cid, the national hero of

Spain. He was born and spent a part of his life here, and is buried in a convent a few miles from the town. The cathedral is the finest Gothic church in Spain after those of Seville and Toledo. The Chapel of the Constable, with its richly carved tombs of the family of that name, is very fine. Close to the west end of the cathedral is San Nicholas, a church well worth seeing for its beautiful high altar, carved in stone from floor to roof. We drove to the Carthusian convent of Miraflores. A monk who took us round asked if we were Americans, and seemed relieved on being told that we were English. Evidently Cuba and the events of 1898 were still in his thoughts. We also went to the nunnery of las Huelgas, a refuge for women of noble families condemned to a life of seclusion, and to the Hospital del Rey. This building, founded in 1225 and restored in 1862, is ill-adapted for a hospital. The beds are placed in small alcoves projecting from a long cheerless corridor, with small windows at the top.

It was a night's journey from Burgos to the Escorial, a great stone building telling of greatness and death, and comprising in itself a convent, a church, a palace, and the Royal Mausoleum of Spain. This is built in a barren waste with a range of hills behind, reminding one of Dartmoor. It is one of the gloomiest places conceivable. Gautier, in his *Voyage en Espagne*, suggests that a man, after seeing it, can always console himself, whatever the trouble of his life may be, by thinking that he might be at the Escorial, and is not. Philip II ordered the Escorial to be built as his own tomb, and had it planned in the form of a gridiron, in honour of St. Lawrence, because he had invoked his aid during the battle of St. Quentin, and was successful in routing the army of France. The church is magnificent, and ranks as one of the great Renaissance churches of Europe. Beneath the high altar is a chamber reserved for the burial of kings and the mothers of kings, and connected by a passage is the burial-place of the rest of the royal family. The most interesting room in the palace is the little inner room or

cell in which Philip II died, from which, through an opening into the chapel, he could see the celebration of mass while too ill to leave his bed.

In the afternoon we left for Madrid, a distance of eighteen miles. Our first impressions of the capital were not promising, for the weather was raw, wet, and disagreeable. The surroundings of the city are not attractive. It was made a royal residence by Charles V in 1524, on account of its bracing air (it is 2130 feet above the sea), which he thought would keep him free from gout. We found it very cold. Let those with weak lungs avoid Madrid in the winter. The men wrapped themselves up in long cloaks drawn quite over their mouths. There is a Spanish saying that "the wind in Madrid cannot blow out a candle, but it is quite enough to kill a man." We were told that in summer it is very hot. These extremes of temperature, among other causes, give Madrid the unenviable distinction of being the most unhealthy capital in Europe. In 1901 the deaths numbered 17,242, and of these 4064 were of children under four years old. This gives a rate of about 33 per 1000. Two great evils in Madrid are food adulteration, which is virtually unchecked, and overcrowding. The 528,000 inhabitants are herded in 17,000 houses, which gives an average of 31 persons per house.

There are many small hospitals in Madrid, and four large ones, viz. the General Hospital, San Carlo, San Juan de Dios, and de la Princesa. We visited the last, which is the most modern. It was built in 1852 by Queen Isabel II to commemorate the birth of the Princess of the Asturias, and was restored and enlarged by King Alfonso XII in 1880. It contains sixteen wards, with sixteen beds in each, and is built in three stories around a central space. The top story is for the accommodation of nurses and staff. The floors are of marble, and there is a dado of tiles on the walls; but the sanitary arrangements are defective, the lavatories, etc., being placed immediately inside the entrance to the wards. This was the best hospital we saw

in Spain, and surgery seemed to be in a much more advanced state here than elsewhere in the Peninsula.

Madrid is less distinctly Spanish than any other city we visited, and has much the same appearance as other European capitals. The Puerta del Sol, the largest *plaza* and the favourite lounge in the city, and the Prado, or Rotten Row, have a gay and lively aspect. In the latter there was a show of carriages and horses as good as man could desire. But the two chief sights are the Royal Armoury, which contains the most perfect collection of mediæval armour in the world, and the Picture Gallery, which is worth a journey to Madrid to see. Velasquez, the unrivalled portrait painter, can be seen here as in no other gallery. He displayed his great genius in painting the plain-looking Infantas in the ridiculous costume of the period, with their curious surroundings of dwarfs and ferocious-looking dogs. They seem as if they were about to walk out of their frames. We could, with little difficulty, believe the story that a couple of these pictures, placed upon easels in Velasquez's studio, made onlookers fancy that the real persons were actually there. In this gallery are many of the most lovely works of Murillo, the painter of holy people and angels and beautiful children. Here is his famous picture "El Tiñoso," or St. Elizabeth of Hungary tending the sick poor, in which he expresses at once both the active human and the devoutly religious conception of life. We knew but little of Goya until we saw his pictures here. He was the painter of peasants and the barbarisms of the bull-fight, where he was evidently at home. The gallery of modern art in the Calle de Alcalá contains pictures of great interest. Madrid has but few fine buildings: the most important is the royal palace on the west side of the city. There is no cathedral, and only one fine church, San Francisco. It has the form of a large rotunda with six chapels, which are adorned with many good frescoes and pictures by modern Spanish artists. It was the Church of the Franciscan Monastery before it was

turned into a parish church, and the monastery is now used as a barrack and military prison.

From Madrid we went to Seville, a journey of fourteen hours. In one of the most delightful papers of that most delightful book, *Virginibus Puerisque*, Stevenson has charmingly described the sensations of a man "ordered south," as he passes from frost and cold into sunshine and warmth. This was our experience. Hitherto we had been in winter, but in Seville the sky was clear, and the air warm and sunny like that of early summer. We were among the palms and orange trees bearing fruit, and geraniums, roses, and carnations flowering in abundance. We went at once to the cathedral, which ranks in size only after St. Peter's at Rome. It is very grand, and the pictures are magnificent. Among the finest are "The Guardian Angel" and the celebrated "St. Antony of Padua," both by Murillo. The figure of St. Antony was cut out and stolen in 1874. A big reward was offered for its recovery, with the result that it was found in America and brought back again in the following year. We were in Seville at Carnival time, and had an opportunity of seeing a curious and an unique ritual, a dance by ten of the choir boys before the altar. They were dressed like pages in doublets of blue satin and gold, and white knee-breeches. Their graceful and dignified movements to the accompaniment of instrumental music and castanets were very striking and most reverent.

Standing high over the cathedral is the famous Giralda tower. It is the work of the Moors, and was designed by Al Geber, the Arabian, with whose productions, of another kind, schoolboys have painful acquaintance, for he is supposed to have been the inventor of algebra. We had no opportunity of seeing a bull-fight. One of our party went to a cock-fight, which seems to have been a cruel and brutal excuse for betting. There is much truth in the couplet,

"He who hath not Seville seen
Hath not seen strange things, I ween."

Seville is not merely a place of pleasure. Merchant ships of large draught were lying in the Guadalquivir close to the city. The tobacco factory, employing 5000 women workers, is an immense building. In spite of dirt and evil smells it should be seen: so also should the pottery where Moorish lustred ware is made.

On leaving Seville we travelled *viâ* Ronda to Algeciras, a Spanish town opposite Gibraltar, where the railway ends. There is an excellent hotel here, the "Reina Cristina," under English management. Here we stayed the night, and early the next morning crossed the bay to Gibraltar, a passage of half an hour. At the gate at the end of the quay the sentry interrogated us as to our nationality: we passed on, proud to find ourselves upon British territory. We spent two days on the Rock, a place dear to every Englishman as a record of past valour. Having obtained the necessary permit, we visited the long, cool, rock-hewn galleries, from the portals in which we had lovely glimpses of the sea, and Spanish hill-tops, and the coast of Africa, which is fourteen miles away. This great limestone rock, sitting so square and seemingly solid on the sea, is honey-combed with these spaces. It is the especial character of the rock material that it will stand, when hollowed out, without any support. The new docks, three in number, constructed at a cost of £5,000,000, are nearly finished. The long principal street was a lively sight, with a motley crowd of many nationalities. So, too, was the market for meat and vegetables, with stalls held by Spaniards on one side, and by Moors on the other. We were disappointed in not catching sight of any of the Barbary apes, the only wild monkeys to be seen in Europe.

On our way back we stayed a night at Ronda, which is grandly situated, and was familiar to us from the excellent description in E. W. Mason's novel *Miranda of the Balcony*. From Ronda to Bobadilla is a run of a little over an hour. This is an important junction. We lunched there and changed carriages for Granada. The railway ride is very

pretty, and passes through the estate of Soto de Roma, which was given by the Spanish Government to the Duke of Wellington. We stayed at the Washington Irving Hotel, which is close to the Alhambra, the most famous show place in Spain. It is always open to the public, and a guide who only repeats what one reads in guide-books is quite unnecessary. The exterior of the Alhambra is bare and plain, but there is nothing more lovely in Moorish art than the interior, with its spacious courts and fretted ceilings, and filagree walls covered with a tracery as delicate as frost-work. Near the Alhambra is the Generalife, the summer palace of the Moorish kings. It is not so large or magnificent as the Alhambra, but the palace gardens, with old cypresses and oranges and myrtles, are still as they existed in the days of the Moorish kings 600 years ago.

Up the hill above the hotel a glorious view is to be had. There are times when nature appeals to us more strongly than does cathedral, palace, or picture. Such an instance was a sunset which we saw from this point. The bold ragged spurs of the Sierra Nevada, covered with snow, stood out grandly against the sky. In the foreground was a lovely landscape, with woods and dwellings set far apart. As the sun sank into a bed of cloud, and then behind the peaks, a faint golden light crept over the snow-clad mountains, producing on those who had eyes to see a mental impression which will always be remembered. It was a Sunday evening, no sound was to be heard, a deep calm pervaded the land on which we stood wrapt in admiration.

The cathedral, which is in the town, is well worth a visit. It contains the magnificent tombs of Ferdinand and his wife Isabella, the great queen who sent Columbus to find the New World. We drove to the Gipsy quarter, a straggling village composed of holes cut out in the side of a hill. These gipsies are not wanderers as in England; they have settled in some of the most prosperous cities of Spain, and make a living by stealing, telling fortunes, and dancing.

Although the distance from Seville to Cordova is only seventy-five miles, the journey took nearly eight hours, owing to changes and waiting. This town, which during the government of the Moors was the capital, and had a million inhabitants, is now poor and half deserted. Its great treasure is the vast and wonderful mosque: the outside has a heavy appearance, but the interior is a most beautiful example of Moorish architecture. The low roof is supported by a forest of columns, nearly a thousand in number, surmounted by horseshoe arches, on which are exquisite carvings. Some of the columns in the centre have been removed, and a Christian church erected. The most interesting part of the building is a small chapel, the Mihrab, where the Koran used to be kept. It is roofed like a shell with a block of white marble, and decorated with mosaics of glass and gold. On the spot where the Koran rested the marble floor is worn into a circular hollow by the faithful Mussulmen, who used to approach it crawling on their hands and knees.

Leaving Cordova at 10 p.m., a long and tiring journey through the night brought us to Toledo the next morning at 11.30. Seen from a distance the appearance of this city, which was once the capital of the whole of Spain, is most imposing. It is surrounded on three sides by the Tagus, and like Rome it stands on seven hills. The cathedral is very grand, and is the See of the Archbishop of Spain. Street says that this cathedral "equals if it does not surpass all other churches in Christendom in the beauty and scale of its plan." The carving of the stalls and the stained glass in the windows are superb. On the walls of the church of St. John of the Kings are hung heavy chains, removed from the limbs of Christian prisoners, who were released when the Moors were expelled. Close by are lovely Gothic cloisters, which have been recently restored. Sword-blades, daggers, and knives, for which Toledo has long been famous, are still made there, as perfect as ever. The old Toledo blades were so elastic that they could be

rolled up like a watch-spring. Formerly the Jews were very numerous and important in Toledo: two old synagogues which contain fine Moorish work still remain.

In the evening we went on to Madrid, and found the people in a state of consternation on account of riots that were taking place in Barcelona. We had arranged to go there, but when it was announced that men were being shot in the streets, and that the disturbances were so serious as to warrant the reserves being called out and martial law proclaimed, we changed our plans and went to Biarritz, a delightful place for a rest after three weeks' hard work sightseeing; then to Bordeaux, a prosperous commercial city with as fine a waterfront as any city in Europe, thence Paris, and finally home.

Looking back upon this visit one fact stands out distinctly, viz. that Spain is in a lamentably backward state. Two amusing incidents were recorded lately in a Spanish newspaper, which could only have happened in such an unprogressive country. The students of Madrid and other universities held meetings, and agreed to present a petition to the authorities that, in honour of the King's coming of age, they should be given their degrees without the formality of a previous examination. The students were not unanimous in this modest demand. Some of them expressed a preference for examination, but the "slack" ones carried the day. In the same paper is an account of a disturbance in the women's ward at the Hospital of San Juan de Dios, occasioned by the punishment of three patients who refused to say their prayers. It is stated that the ringleaders were sent to prison for a fortnight, but that after undergoing this penance they would be allowed to return to the hospital to complete their cure.

It is strange that Spain was more prosperous under the Moors than she has been under Christian rulers, and that since the Moors were driven out, the nation has almost continuously retrograded. Some four years ago the most prominent English statesman, in a speech delivered at

about the time of the destruction of the Spanish fleet in the Pacific, spoke of Spain as a "dying" nation. It is certainly hard to realise that this shrunken Power was England's predecessor as mistress of the seas. Still Spain is far from being a worn-out country. There is no land in many respects more highly favoured: she has mineral wealth, a rich soil with an immense variety of products, grand harbours and broad navigable rivers, and is capable of great development.

During the past seventeen years the position of the Queen Regent has been a difficult one. Summed up in the fewest words, it may be said that under her rule there have been peace, political consolidation, and material development at home; while abroad the loss of the last vestige of Spain's once splendid colonial empire, and with it much of its national pride, may be a blessing in disguise. The country has been relieved from a great drain upon its money and its men, and the hands of its rulers are more free to cope with works of reform at home.

Alfonso XIII, born a king six months after his father's death, succeeded to supreme power on his sixteenth birthday, May 17th, 1902. The task before him of combating the growing forces of republicanism and socialism is not an easy one.

